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ROMANS VIII. 14.

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the Sons of God.

THESE Words are a Reason to inforce the Doctrine which the Apostle had laid down in the foregoing Verse, namely, *That if we live after the Flesh, we shall die: but if through the Spirit, we mortifie the Deeds of the Flesh, we shall live.*

By the Flesh is sometimes in Scripture more particularly signify'd the Inclinations of Men to sensual Pleasures; but living in the Flesh being oppos'd by the Apostle to the Christian and Spiritual Life, we are to understand this Phrase in its greatest Latitude and Extent, for the Corruption and depraved Affections of Human Nature in general. In this Sense also, our Apostle understands the Works of the Flesh, *Gal. v. 19, 20.* where he describes them, not only by the Sins of *Adultery, Fornication, Uncleaness and Lasciviousness; but by those of Idolatry, Witchcraft, Hatred, Variance, Emulation, Wrath, Strife, Seditions, Heresies, Envy, Murder, Revellings, and such like, i. e. all those other sinful Appetites and Disorders of our corrupt Natures, which are inconsistent with a Life of Grace, and by necessary Consequence with the Hopes of Glory. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they, and they only are the Sons of God, i. e. those who live under the Conduct of God's Holy Spirit; as God be thanked we may all of us do, if it be not our own Fault, will not only abstain from the more gross and notorious Sins of the Flesh, but from every known kind and degree of Sin. The Temple which the Holy Spirit delights to dwell in, must be seperated from all common and unclean Uses; he will not suffer any rival Lust or Passion in a Heart wherein*

wherein he has taken up his Residence; and especially ~~we must not think, which yet God knows a great many~~ Christians do, of dividing our Hearts between the Service of Religion, and our Lusts; it is impossible to reconcile or compound Two such opposite Interests: No, if we will cleave to the one, we must resolve to disclaim and relinquish the other; there is no other way.

To this End are those Commands in Scripture, *of loving God with all our Hearts, and with all our Souls, and with all our Might*, Deut. vi. 4, 5. *Of serving him with a perfect Heart, and a willing Mind*, 1 Chron. xxviii. 9. *And of cleaving to him with full purpose of Heart*, Acts xviii. 23. So that to be led by the Holy Spirit of God, is to live in a constant, sincere and uniform Obedience to the Laws of God; To be Holy in all manner of Conversation, and to forsake all the carnal Desires of the Flesh, that is, all the Sins of natural Concupiscence and Corruption whatsoever they be, so that we will not follow nor be led by them.

But because general Instructions do not give Men so clear and distinct a Notion of their Duty, as when we explain to them the several Parts and Branches of it, I shall make it my Business from these Words,

First, To consider (for I cannot descend to treat of them all) some of those special Fruits and Graces which the Spirit of God operates in the Hearts of good Men; that so by examining into the State and Disposition of our own Hearts, you may know whether you be led by the Spirit of God, or by that evil Spirit, which still works in the Children of Disobedience, i. e. in Men of corrupt and unregenerate Hearts.

Secondly, Having done this, I shall consider the great Happiness of those who are led by the Spirit of God.

I. In speaking to my first General, I shall confine myself to explain to you those Words of the Apostle, Gal. v. 22, where in opposition to the Works of the Flesh, he tells us, *That the Fruit of the Spirit is Love, Joy, Peace, Long-suffering, Gentleness, Goodness, Faith, Meekness, Temperance.*

The Fruit of the Spirit is Love, i. e. the Love of our Christian Brethren with whom we are united under

Christ the Head, into a holy and regular Society; and this Union is made by the holy Spirit, influencing and informing the several Members of this Society, as the several Functions of our Animal Life are actuated by one Soul. From whence the Apostle takes occasion to shew at large, 1 Cor. xii. tho' it seems an Argument which few Persons duly consider, that there ought to be the same mutual Tenderness and Affection among Christians in their different Stations and Capacities; that there is observ'd to be between the different Members of the Body Natural. And especially *Love*, is very properly reckon'd by the Apostle as one of the first Fruits of the Spirit, and which indeed prepares the way for that which follows; and that is,

2. *Joy*. For Love is a Passion which naturally enlarges the Heart, and fills it with pleasing and grateful Sensations; but it is never more pleas'd than when it is employ'd in real and sensible Acts of Kindness or Beneficence: And especially to a good Man, to a Man whose Heart is surpriz'd with a true Sense of Christian Love; nothing can be so great a Pleasure as to do Good. *Solomon*, who liv'd under a Dispensation wherein the Precepts of mutual Love and Charity among Men were not carry'd so high, nor enforc'd upon those new and engaging Motives, as in the Gospel (upon the Account of which our Lord calls that Charge which he gave to his Disciples of *loving one another, a new Commandment*) yet this Wise Prince, I say, speaking of the Advantages and good Things (as we call them) of this World, tells us, *That he knows no good in them; but for a Man to do good and rejoyce in his Life.*

And certainly, he, who had drunk as deep as any Man in the Cup of sensual Pleasures and Delights, was the best able to judge wherein the true and proper, and solid Joys of Human Life consist. Nay, if any thing could be suppos'd to contribute to the Happiness of the Divine Life, if God could receive any joyful Accession to the eternal Felicity of his own Nature, I do not doubt but it was when *all the Angels of Heaven*, in Admiration of the wonderful Works of his Goodness, *shouted for joy*: Or after Men had fallen from their Original and Blessed State,

State, when the Angels celebrated that Divine Grace which restor'd them again to it, in that heavenly and joyful Anthem, *Glory be to God on high; and on Earth Peace, and Good-will towards Men.*

If God, in the ordinary Methods of his Providence, *be said to delight in Mercy*, Mic. vii. 18. *and in exercising Loving-kindness*, Jer. vii. 24. We cannot but think (I speak after the Manner of Men) that upon these extraordinary and glorious Occasions of his creating and redeeming Love, he was wonderfully rejoiced and delighted in his own Contemplation of them. Let us then, as the Apostle exhorts, *be Imitators of God as dear Children*: Let us Evidence that we are the Sons of God, by walking after his Blessed Example, *in Love*; and then, if our Hearts be not altogether insensible, we cannot fail of experiencing in them, *how good and joyful a Thing it is to do good.*

3. A third Fruit of the Spirit here mention'd, is *Peace*: By which we are not to understand in this Place that inward Complacency and Satisfaction of Mind arising from a Sense of our Duty, and the Testimony of a good Conscience; for in this Sense it could not be well distinguish'd from Joy: But we are to understand by it a peaceable Temper and Disposition of Mind towards all Men, and a desire of living in a friendly and sociable Manner with them; as also the interposing our good Offices to make up those Breaches which may happen among Men, and to persuade them to cultivate a good Understanding with one another, as becomes the true and genuine Disciples of the Meek and Holy Jesus, *the Prince of Peace*: Accordingly, *James* iii. 17, 18. the Apostle shows us, *That the Wisdom which is from above, from the Spirit of God, is not only peaceable in its Nature and Disposition, but in its pacifick and charitable Effects; And the Fruits of Righteousness are sown in Peace, of them that make Peace.*

4. As a necessary Consequence of a peaceable Temper, follows *Long-suffering*: For how much soever we may be dispos'd to live in an amicable Manner with other Men, yet (as the World goes) we cannot expect to be altogether free from Injuries and Provocations: Let us
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do what we can to prevent it, some occasions or other will now and then be offer'd or taken; which may give us trouble and uneasiness from those with whom we have to do; and sometimes from those with whom we have no manner of Dealing or Conversation.

To preserve therefore our Minds in an even, calm and compos'd Temper towards other Men, 'tis necessary we shou'd not hastily or easily be provok'd; that we shou'd bear patiently with Human Frailties and Inadvertencies; that we should make some Allowances for the common Entertainments of Conversation: And we ought to be the more easie and favourable upon all these Accounts, when we consider our selves also how apt we are to be tempted to the same Irregularities, and how often in fact we are. Nay, if we will maintain a true Christian and even Correspondence with all Men, we must not only in many Cases be above those unjust Aspersions whereby we are attack'd in our good Names, but also when we are injur'd in our civil Rights, forbear to redress our selves by violent and revengeful Methods: In some Cases indeed, as it tends much more to preserve our Temper, so it's more generous to depart altogether from our own Rights, than to seek redress for the Wrongs done us; especially by tedious and expensive Law Suits, which are usually prosecuted with that Violence, that cannot be reconcil'd with the Temper of those, *who are led by the Spirit of God*; the Fruit whereof is *Long-suffering*. And,

5. *Gentleness and Goodness*: Dr. *Halsmond* puts both these together, and makes *Gentleness* (*Xenosus*) to consist in a kind Disposition to beneficent Actions, and *Goodness* in the actual Performance of them.

And indeed we have no way certainly to know what manner of Spirit we are of, but by reducing our Dispositions into Act. For all the Duties of Religion are so reasonable in themselves, that when we consider them abstractedly in our own Minds, without any opposition from our sinful Lusts and Passions, we cannot but delight in the Law of God after the inward Man; and find in our selves some good Inclinations at least to practice it. *Rom. vii. 22*. But when we come to the Tryal, *when we would do Good, and find the Evil*, which we did not foresee or forewarn our

selves against, *present with us*; How often alas! do our Hearts and even our good Resolutions too deceive us.

And especially if we would know the Bottom of our good Dispositions to Acts of Kindness and Beneficence, we must embrace all occasions of exerting them, and where occasion does not offer, it will be an Argument that our Dispositions are sincere to seek them out; we must not content our selves neither with a meer Complement of Condolance, and some outward empty Expressions of our Kindness and Charity, *saying to a Brother, or a Sister that is naked and destitute of daily Food, Go your way, be ye warmed or filled, without giving them what is convenient for them*: For this is not so much to contribute to their Relief, as to relieve our selves from their Importunity. But if we would discover a true Goodness and Beneficence of Temper, we must follow the Example of the Great God, *who is Good, and does Good*; and of the Son of God, *who went about doing Good*.

I know Gentleness is very often explain'd in another Sense, as it denotes an humble and condescending Temper, an easiness of Access, and a readiness where any Offence is given, to hearken to any reasonable Terms of Accommodation; and to hear Matters fairly and impartially scan'd: These were always thought the proper Vertues and Qualifications of a Gentleman, and they are the Graces of a Christian; whereas an haughty and insolent, a disdainful or inexorable Temper, as it shows that a Man is altogether a Stranger to the Spirit of Christianity, so it is, generally speaking, an infallible Sign of a mean Birth, or of a meaner Education.

6. The next Thing to be consider'd, is *Faith*: Not Faith as it denotes our Belief of the Principles and Doctrines of Christianity, or a firm Reliance on the Providence and Promises of God; but as it signifies Fidelity in opposition to all fraudulent and unjust Acts. As it obliges us to be true and just in all our Dealings, and with all Sincerity to observe the Rule of the Apostle, *1 Thess. iv. 6. That no Man go beyond or defraud his Brother in any Matter, upon any Account or Pretence, or in any Case whatever, whether in a great Matter, or a small*: For, as our Saviour observes, *Luke xvi. 10. He that is faithful in that which is least,*

least, is faithful also in much, and he that is unjust in the least, is unjust also in much. Which being a kind of Proverbial Sentence, is to be understood, as all other Sayings of that Nature are, as generally and for the most part true: And I'm afraid, if those who allow themselves in any little Arts of Fraud or Injustice, will put the Question home to themselves, they will find that it's not out of any true Principle of Religion or Christian Fidelity, but from some worldly Motives of Reputation or Interest, or to keep themselves out of the Reach of the Law, that they do not run into greater Excesses. Were I not here considering Fidelity as a Christian Grace, I might shew the Excellency of it as a Moral Vertue; and how much, in the Opinion of the wisest Moralists, fraudulent and sinister Practices sink Men below the common Esteem and Dignity of Human Nature. There is nothing thought a more just Matter of Resentment to a Man, than to be told he Lies: But it's a mistake to think that a Lie consists only in our not fulfilling our Words; no, every mean Artifice whereby we impose upon the *Weakness*, or take advantage of the *Ignorance* of others, or put off any false or counterfeit Wares, is in effect a Lie, and equally contrary to that Truth and Ingenuity, which both as Men and Christians we ought to discover in all our Dealings; (thus *Ananias* is said to have lied to the Holy Ghost, Acts v. 3. because he kept back part of the Price of the Land which he had sold, and tacitly would have put a Cheat upon the Apostles) and upon which we must all act, if we would have the same joyful Report from our own Minds: which the Apostle, Expresses in, 1 Cor. i. 12. *Our Rejoycing*, saith he, is this, even the Testimony of a good Conscience, that with simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly Wisdom, or according to the false Maxims, whereby Men who have no Views beyond this World, are governed, but by the Grace of God we have had our Conversation in this World, 1 Cor. i. 12.

7. Another Effect of this Grace of God here mentioned, is *Meekness*; by which, tho' the Word is capable of other Senses, I here take it as it signifies a good Temper towards those who are of a different Opinion, and perhaps Communion from our own; considering the Defects and Fallibility of our own Reason, we ought patient-

ly to hear the Reasons of such Men, and where there is any probability of Success, to enter into private Conversation with them, to express a tender and compassionate Sense of the danger they are in, and to use all the proper Means and Arguments we can to restore them. This I take to be the proper meaning and import of Christian Meekness; or, if you please to call it Moderation. This Notion of it we learn from the constant Practice and Example of this Meek and Holy Jesus.

But I do not know that we have any Authority from the Word of God to stretch the Notion of it further, as if our Tenderness towards those that are without and against us, should oblige us to go into Measures directly opposite to the Interests of those that are with us; as if for the sake of a present false delusive Peace, we should sacrifice the real Advantages of Order and Discipline, and lay the Foundation of greater Heats and Contentions for the future. In a word, as if we could not preserve a Christian Temper, without undermining the true and fundamental Rights of the Christian Church.

I proceed to the last Link of this Chain of Christian Graces, which I have been opening unto you, and that is *Temperance*. By Temperance I understand a moderate use of those Things which tend to gratify our bodily Appetites; while we are in the Body, both Reason and Religion allows us to take care for the Preservation of the Animal Life. But all Excess and Disorder being prejudicial to the Christian Life, as well as the Animal, we are obliged to be Temperate, both upon a Natural and a Religious Account; nay, on many Occasions, that we may the better attend the Duties of Religion, and have a greater Command over our Appetites, we ought to deny our selves even Things lawful and innocent. By constantly indulging our bodily Appetites, tho' we do not do it to Excess, our Minds grow dull and heavy, and are fill'd with gross and impure Ideas, and have less relish for the Spiritual Exercises and Delights of Religion.

And especially all those who lay down the Rules of Holy Living, not only prescribe Temperance, but Mortification, as of absolute Necessity to those who would observe them. This was the Method which St. Paul (who

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had so great a Measure of the Spirit of God) took; and if we be led by the Spirit of God, we shall imitate him herein, we shall agree with him, that there are a great many Things, consider'd simply and in themselves, lawful for Men, which are not Expedient for the Christian, and which especially, if we will not come under the Power of, we must resolve to deny our selves in.

I know (*ἐξουσία*) which is here render'd Temperance, does more properly signify Continnence, or abstaining from all immodest and unchast Actions, which are so inconsistent with a Life of True Piety and Religion, that they are usually reckoned at the Head of those Sins of the Flesh, which are oppos'd to the Fruits of the Spirit, and are so inconsistent with his Purity and Holiness, that he will not dwell in a Heart that is defiled with them; and especially, the Apostle expressly declares in the Verse preceeding my Text, *That they who do such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God.*

But my Design in Explaining these Words, being to follow the Literal Sense of them, I shall not insist further upon this Consideration; especially, seeing what I have said in general concerning the Duty of Self-denial and Mortification, may be indifferently apply'd to intemperate and incontinent Persons.

Let us now see what Improvements may be made of what has been said; And,

1. Let us consider all these Fruits of the Spirit of God together, that upon Examining our own Consciences, we may know whether we be led by him. And,

1. Do you then in earnest love your Christian Brethren in that measure and degree which becomes the Members of the Mystical Body, into which you are united by the same Spirit, or which is agreeable to that Sense wherein he calls our Duty to Love one another, a new Commandment?

2. Do you not only love your Christian Brethren, but take a sensible Pleasure and Delight in the Expressions of your Love towards them, in being useful and beneficial, as you have opportunity, to them?

3. Do you live (as much as in you lies) peaceably with all Men, and endeavour to promote Peace and good Will, and compose Differences among others?

4. Do you find in your selves, under any Provocation or Injury done you, a Disposition to forgive those who have done it; or are you moderate and reasonable in your Demands of Satisfaction, and willing rather to depart from your own Right, than to run Things to Extremity?

5. Do not you only Experience in your selves a good Inclination to all generous Offices of Kindness and Humanity towards all Men, but also actually as far as you are capable, perform them?

6. Are you sincere in your way of Commerce and Dealing in the World? Do you, from your Hearts, and as you will answer it to God and your own Consciences, forbear all sinister and indirect Practices, all the little Arts of unjust Gain, how much soever they are authorised by the common Practice of a corrupt World, or may be thought the Secrets of your several Mysteries, Callings, and Professions?

Are you in the next Place sincerely desirous to Reclaim your Christian Brother from the Errors of his Thoughts, and by a Natural Consequence from the Evil of his Ways, that he may be led into the Way of Truth, and hold the Faith in the Unity of the Spirit, and in the Bond of Peace? And do you to this end treat with, and admonish him *as a Brother, and endeavour to restore him in the Spirit of Meekness*; out of a hearty Tenderness and Compassion for the dangerous State he is in, which as it is a more Christian, will be a much more effectual Method to bring him to the acknowledgment of the Truth, than all the false and political Schemes abroad in the World.

And, in the last Place, Do you really and strictly observe the Rules of Christian Temperance and Chastity? Do not you indulge your selves to any vicious Excess in Eating or Drinking, or any other sensual Gratifications? Or rather on the other hand, Do you not deny your selves in Things even lawful and innocent, lest your Liberty in them should prove an occasion of the Flesh? Do you consider that your Bodies, while you possess them in Sanctification and Honour, are the Temples of the Pure and Holy, and Immaculate Spirit of God? And do

you really take care to prepare them for the Reception and Entertainment of this Divine Guest?

Is upon these several Inquiries, you find you have the answer of a good Conscience, then may you comfortably conclude, that you have discover'd in your selves the Fruits of the Spirit; *For if ye be led by the Spirit of God, then are ye the Sons of God.*

From what has been said, we may observe that the best way to know whether we have the Spirit of God, is by bringing forth the Fruits of it. Our Saviour himself has made this the Rule whereby we may *try the Spirits, whether they be of God; a good Tree (viz.) cannot bring forth corrupt Fruit, neither doth an evil Tree bring forth good Fruit.* What shall we then think of those Men, who make a sanguine Temper, or a heated Imagination, or a blind Zeal for the Persuasion they are of; a Zeal which engages them in wicked and ungodly Designs, the only Evidence of their being led by the Spirit of God. The Spirit cannot deny himself in his own Works, or put Christians upon inconsistent Measures and Designs; and especially, whatever Pretensions Men may make to the Spirit, (and the highest Pretenders are many times the greatest Strangers to it) yet if they be not led by the Spirit, *and bring forth the Fruits of it*, we have all the reason in the World to question, or rather indeed to reject and detest their Pretensions. And so again, when Enthusiasts pretend special and immediate Revelations from the Spirit, yet if the Things they have spoken do not come to pass; if we see no Fruits nor Effects of their Predictions, we are to conclude by the same Rule, that it is not the Spirit of God, but a lying Spirit, that speaks in the Mouths of such Prophets.

And if the Fruits of the Spirit be an Argument of our being led by him, this is Matter of great Comfort to good Men, when (as it often happens) their Affections to spiritual Things are not so strong and lively, as at other times; for so long as they are fruitful in good and spiritual Works, and their Consciences do not condemn them for any known Breach of their Duty, tho' they *may seem to be cast down*, yet they may piously conclude, that *they are not forsaken*: Christians of the most exalted Piety and flaming

flaming Zeal, do not always feel the same Fervour in their Devotions, nor can they at all Times have the same Taste for Religion; their Minds are now and then more insensible to the Light, and their Hearts to the Motions of it: A cold and dark Night spreads it self, as it were, over their Souls, and their Impatience for the dawning of the Day makes it appear long too; in this disconsolate State they are fill'd with distracting and frightful Apprehensions, lest God should withdraw the wonted Influences of his Grace, and abandon them to themselves. *Thou didst hide thy Face from me* (saith holy David) *and I was troubled.* This was not only the case of holy David, but of all the Saints that ever liv'd upon Earth; they have all experienced the Vicissitudes of Light and Darkness, of the inward Delectations of Grace, and the Returns of Temptation. We ought not then to be discourag'd, so long as we are not overcome by Temptation; if this sometimes happen to be our own case, God delights to hide himself for a Time from his Children, for the Tryal of their Faith and Love, or to make them more sensible of their Dependance on him, or to increase their Joy *when at length he is found of them.* For it is with the healthful State of the Soul, as with that of the Body; we are never so sensible of the Blessing of it, as in a Fit of Sickness, or immediately after we are Recover'd from it. Thus holy David in the forecited Psalm, after he had experienced the Returns of God's Favour, and special Presence, breaks out into that pious Exultation, *Thou hast turned my Grief into Joy, thou hast encompassed me with Gladness.* In Truth, the inward Consolations and Delights of Grace, wherewith good Men are sometimes visited, are not to be consider'd as the Moral Fruits of the Spirit, or our Duty, but as the free and special Gift of God, which he may dispense when, and after what manner, and in what measure he pleases: 'Tis our Duty to submit to his Dispensations, and patiently await his Pleasure, and hope for the Comforts of his Grace, in the use of the standing and known Means of it; and this, whatever our spiritual Desertions are, which we may be sensible or complain of, will afford us this unspeakable Satisfaction, that we are notwithstanding, led
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by the Spirit of God, and are the Sons of God: For in this the Children of God are manifest, and the Children of the Devil; whoever does not Righteousness is not of God. And by Parity of Reason, whoever does Righteousness, and brings forth the Fruits of it, tho' he is not always in the same Holy Frame and Disposition of Mind, yet may comfortably assure himself that he is of God.

Farther, From what has been said, we may observe the great Degeneracy and Corruption of Christians; for if we must judge of our being led by the Spirit of God, by the Fruits he produces in us, by the Change he operates in our Hearts, from impure and sinful to holy and vertuous Dispositions; How few are there alas! in Comparison, that are led by the Spirit of God: How few that discover in their Lives and Conversations, that they are influenc'd and govern'd by so Divine a Principle: How few that in good earnest seem to have renounc'd the Devil and all his Works, the Poms and Vanities of this wicked World, and all the sinful Lusts of the Flesh. It cannot be dissembled, that a true, solid, and exalted Piety, a Piety worthy of those that are led by the Spirit of God, is a rare Thing, at least not so common as might be expected; and indeed if we did not know the corrupt State into which Christians are sunk, we could not in Reason, we ought not in Charity, to believe it. But alas! our Corruptions are so visible, that even those that pass by observe and object them to our Infamy: *Is this (say they) the City that Men call the Perfection of Beauty, the Joy of the whole Earth, Lam. ii. 15. Thus we give occasion,* as the Prophet observes in the following Words, *to the Enemies of our Sion to open their Mouths against it,* and to question whether there be really that supernatural Power and Principle among Christians, in order to Reform and Convert them, which the Gospel promises, and Divines talk so much of: If there be (say they) such a supernatural Power and Principle among Christians, it's strange we do not discover a more general Reformation among them too. It's strange indeed, and God knows the Objection which is here made is too true; but it may be accounted for, and I need go no further than the Words of my Text to account for it, *as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the Sons of God.*

The Spirit of God draws us by the Cords of a Man, by such Motives and Considerations as are proper to work upon reasonable and free Agents; he invites, he persuades, he moves us to Obedience, but he doth not forcibly compel us to it: So that if we will not hearken to his Calls, nor follow his Motives, our Disobedience does not proceed from any Defect in the Assurances he affords, but in our own wilful Neglect and Contempt of them. And such a Power of Resisting the Grace of God, is not only highly agreeable to the State and Condition of free Agents, but is necessarily suppos'd from the very Nature of Rewards and Punishments. But then we can no more argue from the Abuse of this Power, that there is no such thing as the Grace which the Gospel promises, than we can argue there is no such thing as Light when we will not open our Eyes to see it. If a lame Man that is not able to walk by himself, will refuse the Help or Hand of one that is willing to Conduct and Support him, if he fall into the Ditch or the Mire, the Blame is not to be laid upon him that offer'd his kind Assistance, but upon his own Refusal of it. In like manner: Tho' the Spirit of God affords us all those means which are proper to repair the Defect, and strengthen the Weakness of our Nature, yet if we slight and reject his Offers of them, it is wholly our own Fault, and we must answer for it. And indeed it is as good an Argument against the Christian Religion, that it does not by a miraculous Power enable the *Blind to see*, or the *Lame to walk*, as that it does not reform such stupid and obstinate Sinners as resolve not to be reform'd. After all, it were to be wish'd there were no occasion to answer this Objection against Christianity from the corrupt Lives and Manners of Christians: And tho' what we have said is a sufficient Answer to it, yet it would be much more for the Honour and Interest of our Holy Religion if Christians liv'd more generally up to the holy and admirable Rules of it, and endeavour'd by God's Grace to adorn the Doctrine of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in all things.

And thus I have represented unto you, according to my Method propos'd, what it is to be led by the Spirit of God.

Give

Give me leave, in the next Place, to congratulate with as many of you as are led by the Spirit of God, the Happiness of your Condition.

First, Is it not matter of unspeakable Joy and Satisfaction to you, that all your Prayers to the Throne of Grace for what is really good for you, are always heard? Is it a small Thing to have free Access to the Eternal Deity, *to come boldly, and in full assurance of Faith before him?* How high are Men apt to bear themselves upon the Favour of their Prince, or even of a Subject at the Helm of Affairs, especially if they have his Ear and Confidence, and can have no denial of what is fit to be granted them. And shall we not think it an Honour to be in a State of Grace and Favour with God, to be encourag'd to pray to him, *to have his Ears open to our Prayers?* But you will say, When a Man comes into the Presence of his Prince or of a Grandee, the visible Pomp and Splendour wherewith they are surrounded, their Aspect, the Air of Greatness, which the Imagination naturally supposes, makes a sensible Difference in the Case; whereas, when we address our selves unto God by Prayer, we see nothing of all this. 'Tis granted: But then, I say, what is wanting in the Sensible, is infinitely over-ballanc'd by the real Effects of God's Presence; for if he be not present every where by the Effects of his Power and Knowledge, he is present in no Place, he is not God, he wants those Perfections which are requir'd in a Being infinitely perfect. This is evident from the Reason of the Thing; and the Scriptures as plainly confirm it. *Do not I fill Heaven and Earth? saith the Lord; Jer. xxiii. 24. Whether shall I go from thy Spirit? And whether shall I go from thy Presence? saith Holy David. If I climb up to Heaven thou art there: If I go down to Hell thou art there also: If I take the Wings of the Morning, and remain in the uttermost Parts of the Earth, even there also shall thy Hand lead me, and thy right Hand hold me.* Where the Psalmist omitting all nice Speculations concerning the Manner of God's Presence, in a very lively and elegant Strain declares the Reality of it by those Essential Attributes of his Power and Knowledge:

What therefore if in your Approaches to the Throne of Grace, you do not see God in his Glory and Majesty, God,

whom you cannot indeed thus see and live, yet so long as you know you have an Interest in him, and that he perfectly sees you, and knows your Wants, and that his Power is of the same Extent with his Knowledge; Why! you have the same Encouragement to come into his Presence, and offer up your Prayers to him, as if it were possible for you to see him with your bodily Eyes.

Now consider with your selves, whether there be any Happiness, or indeed (if we silence the Senses and Imaginations) any Honour like this in the whole World; to have the Great God, the *King of Kings, and Lord of Lords*, who is Wise in Heart, and Mighty in Strength, to whose Knowledge all things are present, and to whose Power all things are possible. To have this glorious Being, I say, to be a Patron, a Friend, and what includes all other Blessings, a Father to you: What your Condition may be in other respects in the World I know not, 'tis what God sees fit for you, and we know that tho' we cannot see all the Reasons of his Providence, yet according to the Scheme he himself has laid of it, all things, either with respect to this or a future Life, or both, shall work together for good to them that Love him.

Which leads me in the last Place to congratulate with you the Happiness of your Condition, if you be led by the Spirit of God, with respect to another World.

But here I am at a loss to express my self, or to speak in a Manner suitable to the Occasion; *The Glory of the New Jerusalem, the City of God, prepared for those that Love him, and are led by his Spirit*, astonishes me! I cannot take a clear and distinct View of it; much less if I could, were I able to describe it? But its sufficient that we know enough in general to fill our Hearts with impatient Desires after it; to quicken our Endeavours, to inflame our Zeal, and make us despise all the Terrors and Flatteries, and vain Promises of this World.

'Tis sufficient, I say, to all these Ends, and particularly to support us under all the Sufferings of this Life, *That we know that we are the Sons of God, and if Sons then Heirs, Heirs of God, and joint Heirs with Christ; that if so be we suffer with him, we shall be also glorified with him.*

And especially whatever Tryals God is pleas'd to exercise your Faith with, look upon them as the tender Chastisements of a Father, as the Method God in his Wisdom sees fit to make use of *in bringing many Sons into Glory.*

Consider with your selves that it is but a little Time, and a Period will be put both to the Troubles and Enjoyments of this World, and perhaps to the World it self. Consider that you *have here no abiding City*, that your Inheritance is in another Country, *an Inheritance incorruptible, and which fadeth not away, reserv'd for you in the Heavens;* which as soon as you enter upon, all Tears will be wip'd from your Eyes, and you shall neither know Sorrow nor Pain, nor Suffering more; but Live for ever in perfect Bliss both of Body and Mind, and enjoy all the Plenty and Pleasure, all the Freedom and Fulness which your Father's House can afford: Your Father, whom you will then see Face to Face; your Father, whom ye will then know, *even also as you are known.*

If this be the happy State of the Sons of God, who would not desire to be led by the Spirit of this Great and Gracious God? I am satisfied we must all be convinc'd that it is not only our Duty, but our Happiness to be so. What remains, but while this Conviction is strong upon our Minds, we should consider the Effect it ought to have upon us; and that we should make it our constant Study to discover those Fruits of the Spirit in our Lives and Conversations, which may make us worthy to be called his Sons.

I shall only crave your Patience while I speak a Word or two by way of Direction for the Improvement of the several Graces of the Spirit I have recommended in the foregoing Discourse.

And the Means to this End, which the Holy Scriptures acquaint us with, are too many to be insisted upon; and therefore I shall confine my self to Two or Three of the Publick Ordinances, which God of his infinite Wisdom hath appoointed as the Means of conveying his Spiritual Blessings and Favours to us.

The First I shall mention, is *Publick Prayer*: We have a liberal Promise of our Saviour to encourage our common Addresses to the Throne of Grace, *where Two or Three are met together in his Name, there he hath promised he will be in the Midst of them.*

But indeed the Reason of the Thing shews, that the special Presence and Blessing of God may be hoped for with greater Assurance when his faithful Servants are met to acknowledge their Dependance on him, and magnifie his Name together; *for if the effectual fervent Prayer of one Righteous Person availeth much*, it seems a just and necessary Conclusion that the united Prayers of several Righteous Men should avail much more. And so great is the Charity, so well design'd the Devotions of our most excellent Church, that a considerable Part of them consists in our Intercessions for one another: And for that Reason, one would think, even those that find no good Dispositions in themselves to private Prayer, yet should omit no Opportunities of repairing to the Publick Worship of God, in order to their Edification and Benefit by the Prayers of the Congregation. Prayers recommended by such a noble and fine Strain of Devotion, so pliously adapted to all Sorts and Conditions of Men, and so far exceeding all ordinary Human Compositions, that there is great Reason to believe that they were composed by Men acted by the special Direction of the Spirit of God: Therefore let all Masters of Families see that their Children and Servants repair hither; and also watch their Behaviours in this Place, as they shall answer to God for it if they neglect it. Take care that all secular Thoughts be discharged when you enter into the Sanctuary, and approach the Divine Presence: Remember that this is the Presence-Chamber of the great King of Heaven, and that your Behaviour ought to be suited to the Dignity of the Person whom you are approaching.

But I do not urge this as the only Reason to induce you to frequent this Place; the Honour of God, the Obedience we owe to the Commands of our Ecclesiastical Superiors, and the Desire of avoiding Scandal, and giving our Adversaries occasion of Reproach, oblige you to repair to the Publick Worship of God upon the Lord's Days. Even common Decency will not suffer any Person (without great Necessity) then to be absent; nor, indeed, upon any occasion on the Week-Day, which we are not otherways very well and usefully employ'd.

Secondly, Another Publick Means God hath appointed for our Religious Improvement, is *Preaching*; I might, perhaps, for my own sake, if I had no further Views, have omitted to have said any thing upon this Head, being conscious to my self of my Inability (considering the great Attendance to be given to Parochial Offices in this Parish) to discharge so great a Function in so large and numerous an Auditory: But my Consciousness in this respect raises (as it always has done, and always will do) my grateful Sentiments of the Favours and Civilities you have continually done me, to much the higher.

But what I intend is, that *Preaching* being an Ordinance of God, we may hope for his Blessing upon it, and for that Reason ought to give Attendance to it, whatever the Capacity of my self, or those that are to succeed me in this Station, are, as being such whom God hath deputed to minister to you in this Office; for indeed, after all, it is not the Personal Qualifications of the *Preacher*, *That He could speak with the Tongues of Men and Angels*; but a pious Temper and Disposition of Mind in the *Hearer*; and above all, the Grace of God, which renders the *good Seed of the Word fruitful*.

Thirdly, Therefore in the last Place, let me recommend to you a frequent Participation of the Lord's Supper: When we consider what high Things are spoken of this Blessed Sacrament, and with what Happy and Soul-saving Effects it is attended, one would imagin it needless to exhort Men constantly to repair to it. And therefore I shall not urge to you any Motives or Arguments from the Advantages of Communicating at the Lord's Supper whenever it is administred; that (and the usefulness of Private Prayers in your Families) being excellently preform'd by your Reverend Rector, and put into every of your Hands: But beseech Almighty God on all Occasions, to dispose your Hearts for the worthy Reception of it in the Time of your Healths, that your Consciences reproach you not for the neglect of it upon your Death-Beds; as it hath too often happened in the Course of my Ministration to sick People in this Parish; and then you will Experience at least some of those Heavenly and Divine Effects, which the Scripture attributes to it.

And

And thus I have gone through the Method I propos'd in speaking to the Words of my Text, and making such useful Improvements as I thought most proper. If I have been so happy as to say any thing that may leave any good or lasting Impression on you, God be praised for it: My Design was, out of a real and tender Concern for You, heighten'd by so many obliging Considerations, to give you the best Instructions I could, in order to a Holy and Religious Life, which as it is the last Office I may be capable of doing you in this kind, so it is the best I can do you in any kind.

Last of all, my Brethren, let Religion be your Study in all its Parts and Graces; let us keep his Sabbaths, and observe his Ordinances, those particularly I have been recommending unto you; be sure to read and observe his Word, that you may Profit by it; and let your Delight be in the Law of the Lord; let us Tremble at his Name, and do his Will: Flee from Sin, and all your Lusts; and particularly, remember the New Commandment that was given by our Blessed Saviour, *That ye Love one another*, and that ye live together as Brethren: Remember, that Religion doth not consist in *Meat and Drink*, but in *Righteousness and Peace and Joy in the Holy Ghost*; then will God continue his good Protection to our most gracious QUEEN; to our Fleets and Armies abroad, and give Success to their present Endeavours for putting an End to a bloody and expensive War, by procuring such a Peace as may tend to the Glory of Thee, our God, to the Preservation of Her Sacred Majesty, the Protestant Succession, and the common Good and Welfare of these Kingdoms.

May God bless you and your Children, your Servants and Dependants, and preserve your going out and coming in, and give Success to all you put your Hand unto. I shall conclude all with the Words of St. Paul, 2 Cor. xii. 11. *Finally, Brethren, farewell; be perfect, be of good Comfort, be of one Mind, live in Peace, and the God of Love and Peace shall be with you, Amen.*

F I N I S.